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SOME FACTS ABOUT TUBERCULOSIS

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About one person in every nine, at present, dies of tuberculosis. After the war there will be even more of this devastating disease, due to privations and to overlong working hours for those who are able to work.

The Great White Plague has become a question of national and international importance to the United States. There is a special branch of the medical corps to combat tuberculosis in the army establishments in this country, and an expert American commission is in France studying conditions there. Practically all the French prisoners to be returned by Germany are in some stage of tuberculosis, and in all, 150,000 cases exist, at the present writing, in the French army. No American soldiers who bear any evidence of this disease, are being sent to France.

In the great southwest one learns that tubercular people may be plump and well-looking without displaying symptoms of any disease. In the east, we infer that a person has tuberculosis of the lungs when he or she is emaciated, coughing, and running a temperature. In reality we are meeting tubercular people every day whom we do not recognize as such because, unless the disease is very active, they are like others, even to the experienced eye of the physician.

All civilized persons come in contact with tubercular germs. Ordinary dust taken from a New York street car was used in an experiment with guinea pigs and every one of twenty-five inoculated became infected with tuberculosis. Dust from the baseboards of cottages, which were frequently disinfected but which had been occupied for thirty years by tubercular patients, when similarly experimented with, infected only one guinea pig out of twenty-five.

Why, then, are we not all infected by these germs? A new theory is that a larger portion of humanity is tubercular than is generally supposed, that ninety-five per cent of the population is so at some time or other in their lives. Post-mortem examinations and inoculations of tuberculin have revealed many unsuspected cases. The tuberculin test is only reliable when negative, as it frequently reacts to an old lesion. The guinea pig test is valuable only in examining sputum for phthisis.

There are three types of persons who come in contact with the tubercular germ: those who have no resisting power, and who readily succumb; those who harbor the living germs for years, showing their

presence by periodical "flare-ups" (in such cases some persons are absolutely cured); and others who possess some resisting power to combat and obliterate the germ.

The southwest is becoming voluntarily colonized with tubercular persons, many of whom, owing to the dry atmosphere and the predominance of sunshine, have become "cures" and are living lives of usefulness in their community, but the number of those who are invalided to the extent that they are not able to assume the burdens of an active life are pathetically many, and those who are not fitted for manual work except by education, soon become a burden to the community to which they have come.

The problem of the indigent tuberculous is far from a solution. The Kent bill, which would provide transportation home for the dependent consumptive who has left his own state or would give him Federal financial assistance at the rate of seventy-five cents a day for sanatorium care, failed of passage in Congress, and while similar bills are pending, no immediate action is anticipated because of the preeminence of war interests.

The idea of founding a colony for the dependent tuberculous has been discussed. A physician who has studied and treated tuberculosis for fifteen years (now a captain in the tuberculosis division of the Army Medical Corps), has an idea that it would be well to establish a city in New Mexico for the tubercular poor at one of the old army forts, which should be under Federal control, but with each state contributing to its support. There might be a government store with goods purchasable at cost, and the rent of adobe houses for patients and their families might be free of cost.

Persons opposing this plan would probably say that it would encourage pauper consumptives to come to the southwest, but they flock here anyway and, unprovided for, are more or less of a menace to the community. Some people might say, "Why send the sick poor out here to die?" They would die in comfort, at least, or else they would be given a chance for recovery in the wonderful climate. Fort Bayard, New Mexico, where the United States Army and Navy sanatorium for tuberculosis is located, was selected by General Sternberg as the most favorable spot in the United States climatically for the treatment of the disease.